



The School Social Worker Spotlight

Paige MacQueen, R.S.W.

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Choosing Positive Defense Mechanisms

Defense mechanisms are what we use when faced with stressful situations. It is like having a suit of armour to protect ourselves when we feel embarrassed, angry or hurt. Choosing positive defense mechanisms at a young age is important, but it is worthwhile to remember at any age. The problem is that we often fall back on negative defense mechanisms that hurt ourselves or other people. Below are four tips for children, teens and adults to keep in mind when choosing positive defense mechanisms.

Identify How You Feel

When you are in a stressful situation, are you getting angry, frustrated or nervous? Before things escalate, brainstorm how you can calm yourself down to avoid getting into trouble. Possible suggestions could be: take a breather, walk away, make a joke or *ask for help.

Don't Let Others Control How You Will Respond

You know someone is trying to control you if they are yelling at you, attacking you, or are putting you down. Responding back the same way is giving that person what they want; they want you to react! Remember to not fall into their trap by mirroring their behaviour.

Practice Controlling Your Emotions

The key to being in control is to be one step ahead of the person or situation that is bothering you. Role playing situations is a good way to practice controlling your emotions. This gives you time to think about your response before blurting/acting it out.

Stay Focused

A positive defense mechanism does not hurt yourself or other people. Stay in control of your emotions by focusing on what the outcome will be if you lose control (ex. the loss of respect, freedom and/or opportunities at home, school, work etc.)



**If your child/teen does not feel safe handling a conflict, make sure they know who they can go to for help.*

Reference: *The WhyTry Program*; www.whytry.org